

IKEA MEETS JAPAN



by Lars Petersson,
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“Home is the most important place in the world” - our belief that many think is difficult to realize in Japan. Combining the long working hours and vast amount of entertainment availability outside of home, home often becomes a “place to sleep” rather than a “place to enjoy”. It does not come to a surprise that furniture & household goods make up only 1.7% of the retail market in Japan. So, had IKEA gone insane in entering such a market?

At IKEA, we have a long history in finding opportunities in difficult environments. Our opportunity lies very much in providing solutions for the unique Japanese needs in the homes, and to make Home and Home furnishing important and interesting in Japan.

Back in 2006 when we opened our first store in Funabashi, Chiba, we started introducing the concept of “home furnishing”. Since then, it has been vital for us to understand the functions and behaviors that occur in the Japanese homes and connect their needs to our offer. Interestingly enough, we came to realize that not only the functions that take place in the homes are similar, but 85% of the apartments built in the last 10 years have the same floorplan.

The more we understand the needs in the market, the closer our stores and our communication gets to solving peoples problems in the homes. Then one can say, IKEA's products are not developed for Japanese small space living! How can that work? The beauty with our range is that it is modular and

can be built in many different ways to suit Tokyo, as well as Los Angeles. We provide more two-seater sofas in Japan compared to the US, where three-seaters are suited better.

Our storage systems are completely flexible and can be built for the special Japanese wardrobe "Oshiire" as well as for a spacious Swedish country house. The important thing for us is to be “obsessed” with people’s everyday interests and activities at home and consequently become the indisputable expert in life at home in Japan.

Our success in Japan very much comes from the ability to offer home furnishing solutions with Scandinavian unique design at unbeatable low prices. We have opened 3 new stores and a warehouse last year and currently have 5 operating stores in different regions.

The external economic downturn has certainly added onto the significant increase in our brand awareness, as people turn to the one with the value for money offer in bad times. If you are looking for home furnishing products with good design, functionality, and quality for a low price, you turn to IKEA.

Providing a work place where opportunities are not limited due to one’s background is another reason we are proud to be in Japan.

Offering a Swedish way of working, where work-life balance is possible and women are given equal chances to develop, has resulted in an overwhelming number of motivated and competent individuals to be attracted to our company. It is remarkable to have 42% of all mana-



gers as women, when Japanese companies usually have less than 5%. Additionally, we also encourage our coworkers to take their vacation and promote benefits that suit the needs of individuals in different life stages.

Our aim in Japan is to be known as people's "partner in Life@Home in all stages of life" both for our coworkers, as well as for our customers, who can grow up and mature together with our products. We see high potential in our contribution to increasing the home furnishing market even more in Japan, by provoking the status quo and providing alternatives and solutions.

As the market grows, IKEA Japan will grow together. The fact that our company received the highest growth rate in comparison to previous year in Nikkei Marketing Journal's Brand Image Survey 2009, signifies that the road we have taken so far has indeed been in the right direction. Perhaps it is not too far until the home becomes a "place to enjoy".

Recently, I had the chance to visit a world heritage preservation of a traditional Japanese house in Shirakawa-go, Gifu prefecture.

The house was pleasantly furnished with minimum material, which reminded me

the aesthetic beauty that is innately embedded in the Japanese hearts. I must say that I was quite amazed to see a familiar saying hung on the wall of one of the traditional houses - "Home is the most important place in the world".

